Grande Prairie Herald
Historical Edition.

BOARD OF TRADE HAS BEEN VALUABLE ORGANIZATION.

In the development of the vast south Peace River country, both agriculturally and commercially, a large measure of credit is due to the organization of men from both town and country who have carried on the multitudinous activities of the Grande Prairie Board of Trade. From the earliest days of settlement the board of trade or the publicity committee which preceded the official organization of that body, has been ever to the forefront in promoting the welfare of the district in the matter of railway development and transportation, agricultural development and better marketing facilities, freight rates and the ultimate objective of the district in procuring a transportation outlet to the Pacific coast.

Destruction of some of the earlier records leave the details of the earliest activities somewhat obscured.

During the first three or four years all efforts toward progress were more or less individualistic, but about the year 1914 community effort began to take shape, and P.M. Bezanson appears to have been the first secretary to look after correspondence for this community committee which was later to develop as the board of trade.

In 1915 the first big effort was made, when P.J. Tooley as secretary was instrumental in assisting to send Harry Adair, the biggest farmer of the district, to Ottawa as a delegate from the Grande Prairie district to urge upon the

government and the Canadian Northern Railway the urgency of building the railway through from Whitecourt to Grande Prairie, and the opening of the road through the same route. Although this trip did not achieve the desired result, the district was put in closer touch with government departments, and this association proved of value later when further delegations were sent on similar errands.

Again in 1919 Captain C.E. Howell, Hugh Allen and Chris. A. McDonald were sent as a delegation to press for the building of the coast outlet, and in 1923 began a series of bombardments of the government at Ottawa in which the town of Grande Prairie, the municipal districts of Grande Prairie and Bear Lake, and many private citizens, contributed funds amounting to several thousand dollars to maintain delegations at Ottawa during the sessions of 1923, 1924 and 1925.

The virile public spirit of the north country is evident from the list of donations made to this huge fund for the first delegation in 1923. The list of private donations totalling $4,287.75 shows these to have been contributed from Clairmont, Sexsmith, Grande Prairie, residents of the two municipal districts, $100 each from F. Turner, Lee Alward and J. Harris, and a private loan of $1,000 from Mr. Alward. The municipalities contributed with $800 from Grande Prairie municipality, $500 from Bear Lake and $300 from the town of Grande Prairie. There was also an anonymous contribution of $500, making total contributions of $4,829.28. J. E. Thomson and Wm. Innes, who were sent as delegates, advanced sums of

$455 and $800 respectively for the carrying on of the work while awaiting the securing of the funds required.

Messrs. J.E. Thomson and Wm. Innes acted as delegates during the sessions of 1923 and 1924, and were joined in Ottawa by Anson Wagar, whose resourcefulness in securing audiences and other advantages was notable. Four months of effort on the part of the delegates in 1923 resulted in a survey being authorized, but further efforts toward construction were unavailing, as they have been to date. Mr. Thomson was accompanied by L.C. Porteous on the 1925 trip to Ottawa.

The file of correspondence which passed back and forth at that time is the record of an intensely earnest pioneering people fighting for the facilities which has been promised them for years, and without which the north country could never hope to attain its complete development commercially or agriculturally. It is a fight which has not yet been finished but which must be carried on until such time as we have gained our one great objective--an outlet to the Pacific coast.

During these same years the board of trade undertook and accomplished its greatest effort in advancing the interests of the grain growers of the north country, in securing the removal of the mountain freight tariffs which had been in effect on the E.D. & B.C. railway. This fight was first taken before the board of railway commissioners at Edmonton in 1921, and proved unavailing. Later under the leadership of J.H. Sissons, who had been retained as couns-

ellor by the board, a sittings of the railway commission was secured at Grande Prairie in October, 1923, when the case was splendidly presented,with a mass of evidence presented by local farmers and shippers. Arguments between witnesses and members of the board of commissioners waxed hot at times and Joshua Fletcher at one point took the case in his own hands when he advised the chief commissioner that he had come to give his evidence and proposed to give it in his own way--which he did in a most emphatic manner. While the late Hon. F.B. Carvell, who was then chairman of the board, was unfavorable to the request, Hon. Frank Oliver delivered a masterful minority report, and shortly afterward the north country secured the long fought for reduction in rates to be followed a few months later by a further and unexpected reduction in the application of the Crows Nest rate structure to all Western lines.

Valuable as this concession to the north has been it was but one of a long program of active work year after year in promoting the welfare of the north country from every possible angle. When the sale of the E.D. & B.C. railway by the province was being discussed, the board of directors of the C.P.R. visited the Grande Prairie district, and after a long discussion with the council of the board of trade held the only C.P.R. directors meeting ever held outside of Montreal. This meeting was held on board the C.P.R. official train at Sexsmith with the local board of trade represented, and it was following this meeting that the final purchase of the road was authorized by the directors.

The first co-operative shipment from the north country was sponsored by the board of trade. This was in 1922, when the Alberta market for turkeys and poultry was wholly unsatisfactory. Under direction of officers of the board of trade, Messrs. P.J. Tooley, the secretary, and Geo. Fowler personally guaranteed a loan at the bank to cover freight charges on two and one-half carloads of turkeys which were shipped to the Vancouver market. The effort was highly successful, the shipments bringing an excellent price and netting local farmers a handsome profit.

The board of trade has taken an active part in promoting one of the most important branches of northern agriculture, that of pure seed growing. While credit is due the Peace River Seed Growers association, composed of local farmers, for establishing the south Peace River country as the greatest pure seed supply in Western Canada, it is also a fact that this organization was assisted and fostered by the board of trade, which has also taken an active part this season in securing the attention of the board of grain commissioners for Canada in holding a special sittings in Grande Prairie to investigate unsatisfactory conditions in grain marketing.

The fight for subvention of freight rates on grain pending construction of a coast outlet has been carried on consistently.

One major recognition of the grain growers was obtained some years ago when favorable consideration was given the

request of Grande Prairie Board of Trade for a reduction in storage charges on grain at country elevators from one and one-half to one cent per bushel. Although this concession was later lost it was of very substantial benefit to farmers during the years it was effective.

Another concession was secured with the co-operation of Grande Prairie Board in 1930, when the wheat bonus of five cents per bushel, at first applicable only in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, was extended to include the Peace River Block in British Columbia. In this matter the Grande Prairie board was the first to take up the matter of an adjustment, and co-operated whole-heartedly with the boards of Pouce Coupe, Rolla and Dawson Creek in securing this recognition of the Block.

Another movement in which Grande Prairie has given full co-operation is the formation and work of the Associated Boards of Trade of the Peace River country. This organization, formed in 1932 under the leadership of W.D. Albright, then president of the Beaver Lodge Board of Trade, ably assisted by Geo. K. Slaney, also of Beaver Lodge, has endeavored with a large measure of success to co-ordinate the work of all Boards of Trade throughout the Peace River country by uniting the efforts of the entire northern part of Alberta and British Columbia on matters of major importance. The annual meetings of the Associated Boards have been held at Beaver Lodge, High Prairie and Pouce Coupe, and have brought about a spirit of co-operative effort and the discouragement of sectional strife to a marked degree. Mr. L.C. Howard of

Sexsmith, is the capable president of this organization for the current year and has as his able assistant and secretary Mr. W.R. Roberts, also of Sexsmith.

Carefully avoiding petty or contentious matters and giving their full attention to the major problems of development the board of trade has on its program today several major items upon which they are devoting their unceasing attention until satisfaction has been secured. The construction of an outlet to the Pacific is perhaps the largest of these items but of almost equal importance in commercial development is the necessity of securing outward class freight rates to establish wholesale activities on a firmer basis than is possible under present rates, and also bring down living costs to a par with the larger centers of the West.

While complete records are not available from which to secure a list of those who have served in the various offices of the board since its inception, there are certain names that stand out prominently in all the public work of this valuable organization over a long period of years. When the board was incorporated under the Dominion Boards of Trade Act in 1919, we find the following as the first list of officers under that incorporation:

J. E. Thomson, president.

Geo. Crummy, vice-president.

J.H.E. FitzAllen, secretary.

C.L. Grisdale, Finance committee.

W. F. Stevens, agricultural.

G.A. James, reception.

J. M. Crummy, transportation.

R. L. Michaelis, roads.

Dr. L.J. O'Brien, hospitals.

P.M. Bezanson, social entertainment.

C. A. McDonald, railways.

Among others who have been active and have served in the various offices of the board are to be found prominently the names of L.C. Porteous, Wm. C. Pratt, D.W. Pratt, P.J. Tooley, D. W. Patterson, P.V. Croken, J.H . Sissons, T.W. Lawlor, C. H. Bennett, J. H. Hunter, I. Nelson, C. Stredulinsky, C. Spencer, J. B. Oliver, J. W. Pickard, C. R. Bell, C. G. Butchart, A. R. McMillan, M. W. Eagar.

Officers of the Grande Prairie Board of Trade for 1934 are:

President, D. W. Patterson.

Vice President, C. C. Fleming.

Secretary, P.J. Tooley.

Treasurer, C.R. McKay.

Executive, L. C. Porteous, J. E. Thomson, Joe Crummy, W. C. Pratt, P.V. Croken, J. H. Sissons, J. W. Pickard, C. Grahan, A.H. McQuarrie.